A GRIT HOCKEY RESEARCH REPORT

IS THERE REALLY NO SUCH THING AS A BAD DUMP?

41 DUMPS. 1 SHOT ON GOAL. 0 GOALS.

The dump-in is taught at every level of hockey as the safe, responsible play — get it deep, go get it, no harm done. We logged every zone entry in five NHL games, all 759 of them, and counted what the dump actually returns.

Sean Avery promises peewee teams wins for chipping it in. Edmonton's whole system is built on the dump. Here is the count.

Toronto at NY Islanders, Jan 3, 2026 • Chicago at Boston, Calgary at Edmonton,
LA at Vegas, Oct 8, 2025 • Ottawa at Tampa Bay, Oct 9, 2025
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TL;DR

The short version

This fall, Edmonton's coach Mike Babcock defended the dump-in on camera — “What's a bad dump? You made them turn” — and Sean Avery told minor hockey coaches that chipping and chasing would win them games. We counted what the dump actually returns. The whole report is on this page; the pages after it explain the reasoning in full.

- NHL teams rarely dump the puck in. In five full games we counted 759 zone entries, and only 41 of them were dumps — about one entry in twenty. Teams carried or passed the puck in on the other 718. Page 4 shows the count for each game.
- The dumps produced almost nothing: one shot on goal and no goals. Entries where the team kept the puck produced 32 goals. Page 5 follows each dump to its end, and page 6 gives the same numbers for controlled entries.
- A dump only helped when the attacking team got the puck back. The 24 dumps the attackers never recovered produced no offence at all — no goal, no shot, not even a shot attempt.
- Seventeen of the 41 dumps gave the puck away for nothing under the definition used in this report: the attackers did not recover it, and the defending team carried or passed it out cleanly within ten seconds. Page 10 shows what that definition does to the count.
- Dumping the puck still has honest uses: relieving pressure, completing a line change, running down the clock, and placing the puck where a teammate can reach it first. Page 7 lists them, and page 8 makes the fuller case — the teams and game plans the dump genuinely serves.
- Young players should be taught to carry or pass the puck in first. The dump should be a play a player chooses for a reason, not the default play he is drilled to make. Page 9 sets out what to teach.
- This report makes a strong claim from a small count of dumps. Page 10 lists every limit of the study in full.

THE COUNT

How we counted

No stats provider publishes what happens after a dump-in — league tracking follows the puck, not the play type. So we built the census by hand: a full event count — not a sample — of **every zone-entry attempt in five NHL games**, coded from the broadcast video, which was the only source used for entry type and outcome.

The sample

Toronto at NY Islanders (January 3, 2026); Chicago at Boston, Calgary at Edmonton, and Los Angeles at Vegas (October 8, 2025); Ottawa at Tampa Bay (October 9, 2025). Every game finished within two goals — close games, chosen deliberately. One is a mid-season game; four are opening-week. That split is labelled wherever it matters.

What counts as an entry

A zone-entry attempt is the puck crossing — or being directed across — the offensive blue line by the attacking team. Each attempt was coded one of four ways: **CARRY** (skated across in possession), **PASS-IN** (a pass across the line, received cleanly), **DUMP** (sent in with no controlled reception — a rim, a corner chip, a soft chip, a cross-corner send, a bank, or a straight shoot-in), or **FAILED** (died at the line — logged, but not an entry).

One family was kept out on purpose: length-of-ice sends from a team's own zone with nobody up-ice to chase them — mostly penalty-kill clears — were logged as a separate **CLEAR** family and never counted as entries or dumps. Counting a penalty-kill clear as a dump would flatter the dump and insult the clear.

Following the play

Each entry was followed until the defence exited cleanly, a whistle, a goal, or 20 seconds. We recorded the first touch, whether the attackers recovered the puck, how long possession lasted, and the offence produced — **NONE, ATTEMPT, SHOT ON GOAL, or GOAL** — counting only the highest level certain on the broadcast angle. Shot-on-goal numbers in this report are floors, for dumps and carries alike.

Possession donated is our name for the wasted dump: a dump the attacking team never recovered, with the defence out clean within **10 seconds**. The threshold is part of the definition and is stated wherever the count is used. Every entry also carries the manpower and the score state at the moment of entry. Headline rates are even strength (5v5); overtime, where a game had it, is reported separately and never blended in.

> ***Read the caveats on page 10 before you quote any of this. They are part of the finding, and we put them in big print on purpose.***

THE FIVE GAMES

Five games, 41 dumps

Dump share was low in four games and merely modest in the fifth — and the highest-scoring game of the five (LA at Vegas, ten goals) dumped the least.

Game (regulation)	Entries	Dumps	Share	At 5v5	Recovered	Donated (≤10s)
TOR @ NYI — Jan 3 (mid-season)	144	10	6.9%	7.5%	7 of 10	2*
CHI @ BOS — Oct 9 (opening week)	126	6	4.8%	5.7%	4 of 6	1
CGY @ EDM — Oct 8 (opening week)	146	5	3.4%	3.9%	2 of 5	3
LA @ VGK — Oct 8 (opening week)	146	3	2.1%	2.5%	0 of 3	2
OTT @ TBL — Oct 9 (opening week)	197	17	8.6%	9.8%	4 of 17	9
FIVE GAMES	**759**	**41**	**5.4%**	**6.2%**	**17 of 41**	**17**

* One of the Toronto–Islanders game's two coded donations rests on the single most ambiguous row in the census — a neutral-zone stick battle that may have been a loose puck rather than a deliberate send. The unambiguous five-game donation total is 16 of 41. “Donated” = dump, no recovery, clean defensive exit within 10 seconds, here and everywhere in this report.

Two textures worth naming. In Calgary at Edmonton, all five dumps were Edmonton's — **Calgary entered 68 times and did not dump once**, in a game it took to a shootout. And every one of the 41 dumps in the five games came at even strength: nobody in five games dumped on a power play.

The score-state splits

Our protocol requires dump rates to run beside their score-state splits, so here they are — dump share of entries, by the entering team's score state, pooled across the five games:

Entering team is…	Dumps	Entries	Dump share
Tied	21	394	5.3%
Leading	11	179	6.1%
Trailing	9	186	4.8%

The pooled splits are flat — but the games disagree. In Game 1, what little dumping happened clustered while tied (13.3% of tied-state entries in periods 2–3); in Game 5 the split leaned the other way (tied 5.9%, leading 11.1%, trailing 12.0%). **We claim no score-state pattern**: 41 dumps cannot carry one.

THE RETURN

What a dump returns

Follow the 41 dumps to their ends and a clear shape emerges: a dump is only ever as good as its recovery — and most of the time, there isn't one.

- **Recovery: 17 of 41 (41.5%).** The attacking team got its own puck back less than half the time.
- **First touch: defence 19, goalie 17, contested battle 3, attacking team 2.** On 36 of 41 dumps, the first player to the puck wore the wrong jersey — or was the goalie.
- **Sustained possession (five seconds or more): 19 of 41 (46.3%).**
- **Offence: 30 of 41 produced nothing at all.** Ten produced a shot attempt that never reached the net. One produced a shot on goal. None produced a goal.
- **Possession donated: 17 of 41** — no recovery, and the defence out clean within 10 seconds.

The one shot

It came in Ottawa at Tampa Bay: a cross-corner dump Tampa Bay sent in while leading, first touched by the defence, won back in the battle along the boards, and turned into the only dump-produced shot on goal of the five games. It is the exception that identifies the rule — **everything the dump produced, all ten attempts and the one shot, came off the 17 dumps the attackers recovered**. The 24 unrecovered dumps produced zero offence of any kind. A dump that isn't recovered isn't a play. It's a pass to the other team, delivered the long way.

Why they were sent, and where

By the sender's situation: **25 of the 41 dumps were FORCED** — a defender in the carrier's face at the line. Eight were CHOSEN with time and space; eight more couldn't be judged at broadcast resolution. By placement: corner 19, straight at the goalie 10, rim 9, cross-corner 1, unverifiable 2. The straight shoot-in was the worst of them — in Game 5, all five straight dumps were recovered **zero** times. A puck sent at a goalie who plays it is a turnover with extra steps.

One more cost, rarely counted: a dump in Game 5 became an icing — the sender's team took a defensive-zone faceoff for its trouble. The donated puck is the usual price. Sometimes the invoice is bigger.

THE CONTROL GROUP

The other way in

A dump number means nothing without the control group, so here is the same five games' worth of controlled entries — the 718 times a team carried or passed the puck across the line instead of giving it away.

Game (regulation)	Controlled entries	Sustained (5s+)	Shot attempt or better	Goals
TOR @ NYI	134	86.6%	82.1%	5
CHI @ BOS	120	85.0%	91.7%	4
CGY @ EDM	141	84.4%	94.3%	5
LA @ VGK	143	77.6%	84.6%	9
OTT @ TBL	180	75.6%	88.9%	9
FIVE GAMES	**718**	**81.3%**	**88.3%**	**32**

Side by side, pooled: controlled entries held possession for five seconds or more **81.3%** of the time and produced at least a shot attempt **88.3%** of the time — 188 shots on goal and 32 goals. Dumps: 46.3% sustained, 26.8% producing an attempt or better, one shot on goal, no goals.

The goals tell it plainest. The five games produced **37 regulation goals**. Thirty-two came directly off zone entries — and **all 32 came off controlled entries**. The other five were scored off in-zone faceoff possessions, or off sequences whose entry the broadcast never showed. None came off a dump. In Ottawa at Tampa Bay, all nine goals came off carries. In LA at Vegas — the highest-event game of the set — all nine entry goals came off carries. The carried puck did all of the scoring.

Overtime underlines it (kept separate, never blended into any rate above): the four games that reached overtime logged 34 entries between them. All 34 were carries or pass-ins. In the highest-leverage minutes of four hockey games, not one team chose to give the puck away on purpose.

> ***The gap is not effort or intent. It is arithmetic: an entry that starts with possession keeps the puck, the structure, and the options. An entry that starts without it is a footrace the defence usually wins — 36 first touches out of 41 say so.***

THE HONEST EXCEPTIONS

When the dump is the right play

This report is not an argument for never dumping. The data names its own exceptions — and a coach who ignores them would be misreading the count as badly as one who ignores the count itself.

1 • When you're forced

Twenty-five of the 41 dumps were forced — a defender stepping up into the carrier's face at the line. A chip under real pressure beats a turnover at the line every time — a turnover at the line goes the other way against a defence caught flat. The finding is not “never chip under pressure.” Even forced dumps returned almost nothing: the chip is a pressure release, not an attacking play, and it should be coached that way.

2 • To complete a change

A dump that lets three tired skaters get off and fresh legs come over the boards buys something our 20-second window doesn't price: the next shift. Honestly flagged: at broadcast resolution we usually could not certify who was changing, so this value is real but unmeasured here (page 10).

3 • Late, with a lead, to make them go 200 feet

When the clock matters more than the zone, sending the puck deep forces the other team to build the whole rink again. That is clock management, not offence — and it only works placed away from the goalie. The same series carries the warning: one Game 5 dump became an icing, handing the faceoff back in the sender's own zone — the one outcome worse than a donation.

4 • Placed for a chaser — the only dump that ever produced anything

Every attempt and the one shot on goal in five games came off recovered dumps: pucks placed in the corner with the first forechecker already moving. That play is not “dump it in.” It is a pass to a spot your fastest skater reaches first — and even played that well, five NHL games of it returned one shot on goal.

5 • When it's your system

Edmonton is running it right now with the best player in the world bought in, and Florida won the Stanley Cup on it: puck deep, first man on time and through the body, second man on the puck, and the game collected late, when the other defence has nothing left. Inside a plan like that, the dump is not a surrender. Five skaters know it is coming, the forecheck is timed to the placement, and a structure is waiting for the puck once it is won. Page 8 makes this case in full. It is also the hardest use to fake: copy the dump without the plan and all you have is the donation.

> ***The dump has a job description. It is five lines long, and “create offence” is not on it.***

THE FULLER CASE

Where it earns its keep

Page 7 lists the situations where a dump is the right play. This page is the stronger claim: for the right team, built the right way, the dump is not a fallback at all — it is the entry the whole system is built on. Our count prices what a dump returns in twenty seconds. What follows is return that window cannot see, because it accrues across a night, a series, and a season.

Turning defencemen around is a toll, charged all night

Every dump sends a defenceman back the length of the ice under pressure: turn, retrieve the puck with a forechecker arriving, and make a play while bracing for contact. Once, that costs him nothing. Repeated across sixty minutes, it costs him his legs — and the retrievals that were clean in the first period come back fumbled or rimmed to nobody in the third. That is the honest core of the oldest argument for the dump: you are not buying the entry. You are buying the eleventh retrieval.

For some teams, the forecheck is the offence

Judge the dump as an entry and it looks barren. Judge it as the first pass of a cycle shift and it can be the system working: the puck goes to the corner, the first forechecker pins the defenceman, the second man arrives on the puck, and the offence starts in the one place that team reliably creates it — down low, off the wall, at the net front. It is no accident that the only dumps in our count that produced anything were the placed ones with a chaser already moving.

It closes a skill gap

Open ice rewards the more skilled team. A carry-in against a set defence is a contest of hands, edges, and reads, and the better players win it. The dump changes the contest: now it is a race to a spot and a battle on the wall, decided by speed, size, and willingness — things a less skilled team can match. Edmonton's coach put it plainly this season: the less skilled you are, the more often you put it in. That is not an insult. It is arithmetic. The underdog who dumps on purpose is choosing the ground the game is played on.

The teams it fits

The dump earns its keep for deep teams that roll four lines and can send fresh forecheckers over the boards all night. For big, fast wingers who arrive on time and finish through the defenceman. For teams whose scoring lives in the cycle and the net-front scramble rather than the rush. And for any team facing a neutral zone built to refuse space — the tight, trapping hockey where the line is a wall and the placed dump is the only way to play in the other end at all.

None of this rescues the habit dump. The count still stands: on the entry itself, 41 dumps returned one shot on goal. The cumulative case pays out only to teams built and coached to collect it — the forecheck arrives, the cycle is real, and the same effort comes over the boards in the third period as in the first. A team that dumps the puck and then watches has not bought anything. It has made the donation this report counted.

THE TAKEAWAY

What this means for your kid

The NHL count matters to minor hockey for one reason: the dump-in is drilled into kids as the default — the play you make when you have nothing. At the top of the sport, it is the opposite: a rare, situational tool. Teach it in that proportion.

- **Make carrying the default skill.** The blue-line decision your kid needs is how to keep the puck: protect it on the outside hand, change speed at the line, take the middle when it's given. In five NHL games, the carried puck produced a shot attempt 88 times in 100. The dumped puck: 27 times in 100.
- **Practise the entry, not the exit.** Small-area games that begin with a controlled entry — and score the entry, not just the goal — build the habit the modern game actually uses. Reward the winger who delays and finds the trailer over the one who chips it in from the red line.
- **If you chip, chip to a plan.** The puck goes to the corner, the first skater is already at speed, the second goes to the far side. A dump without a chaser arriving is what the NHL count calls it: a donation. On 36 of 41 NHL dumps, the defence or the goalie touched it first.
- **Respect the goalie.** Seventeen of 41 dumps were played first by the goalie. A straight shoot-in at a goalie who handles the puck is a turnover with extra steps. Place it where he can't play it — or keep it.
- **Teach the five honest uses (page 7) as decisions, not habits.** Forced at the line. Completing a change. Killing clock with a lead. Placed for a chaser. Running your system. A player who can name why he's dumping is using a tool. A player who dumps because he's out of ideas is donating.
- **Coaches: run the pencil test on your own team.** One parent, one game: tally the entries, mark the dumps, note what each one produced. If your team's dump returns what the NHL's did — one shot on goal per 41 — you'll coach the entry differently on Monday.

None of this is a talent verdict. Entry skills — puck protection, speed changes, delaying for support — are trainable, repeatable habits, and they compound: the kid who keeps the puck at the line gets the zone time, the touches, and the chances that make players. The game is moving toward possession. Train for where it's going.

BEFORE YOU QUOTE US

The caveats — in big print, on purpose

This report makes a loud claim from a small count, so here is every reason to hold it at arm's length, in one place, at full size. A finding you can't caveat is a finding you shouldn't trust.

READ THIS PAGE BEFORE YOU QUOTE THE COVER

1. **Five games, 41 dumps.** Per-game dump counts run from 3 to 17. Every pooled claim in this report rests on the 41 — single-game dump rates are signals, not findings, and we label them that way.

2. **The slate was chosen close.** All five games finished within two goals, by design; four are opening-week games (October 8–9, 2025) and one is mid-season (January 3, 2026). No blowouts, no playoff games. Dump behaviour in a 5–1 game may differ; we didn't count any.

3. **Broadcast video, 360p, team level.** Entries were coded by team, never by player — nothing here turns on reading a jersey number. Video was the sole source for entry type and outcome; league play-by-play was used only as hints, and it was wrong on the record more than once.

4. **The certainty rule cuts one way.** Offence counts only the highest level certain on the broadcast angle, so shots on goal are floors — for dumps and for carries alike. If anything, the dump's one shot on goal could be an undercount by a net-front scramble or two. It cannot be an overcount.

5. **The donation line is a definition, not a law of nature.** At a 10-second clean-exit threshold, 17 of 41 dumps are donations. At 9 seconds: 14. At 12 seconds: 20. We print the threshold wherever the count appears; pick your own and the story does not change.

6. **One Game 1 row carries real ambiguity.** Toronto–Islanders' second coded donation was a neutral-zone stick battle that may have been a loose puck rather than a deliberate send. The unambiguous donation total is 16 of 41.

7. **Score states disagree between games.** Game 1's dumps clustered while tied; Game 5's leaned the other way. We publish both splits beside the pooled rate and claim no pattern — 41 dumps across three score states cannot carry one.

8. **The change is mostly invisible.** Whether a dumping team was mid-change could rarely be certified at 360p, so change-state figures are floors — and the value of a dump that completes a change is real but unmeasured in this report.

9. **Overtime is never blended.** The overtime figures (34 entries, zero dumps) are reported separately from every regulation rate in this report.

10. **“One shot on goal” is a small number — that is the point and the limit.** This is what dumps returned in these five games, counted as carefully as we know how. It is not a law for every game ever played, and a bigger census could move the rate. It would have to move it a long way to change the conclusion.

THE BOTTOM LINE

The puck is worth keeping.

Five games, 759 entries, and a clean split in what came back. The puck carried across the line produced sustained pressure nearly nine times in ten and scored 32 goals. The puck given away on purpose produced one shot on goal. The dump-in survives in the modern game as a tool with five honest jobs — a pressure release, a completed change, a clock play, a pass to a spot, a system play — and minor hockey does its players a service when it teaches it in exactly that proportion: rarely, on purpose, and never as the default. At GRIT, we prepare kids for where the game is going. Not where it is — and especially not where it was.

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Method and full caveats: pages 3 and 10 of this report. Counts: full event census of zone-entry attempts in five NHL games — Toronto at NY Islanders (Jan 3, 2026); Chicago at Boston, Calgary at Edmonton, Los Angeles at Vegas (Oct 8, 2025); Ottawa at Tampa Bay (Oct 9, 2025) — 759 regulation entries, coded from broadcast video under a frozen protocol (v2). Overtime reported separately throughout.

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